

TimeBank starting in Rock County

By GINA DUWE

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Rock Hour Community

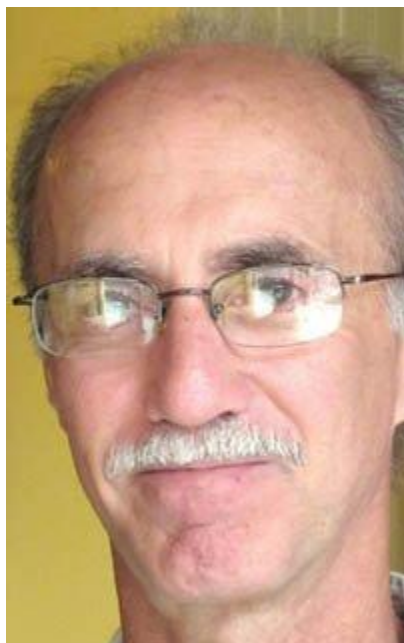
The first public presentation about Rock Hour Community will take place at the Evansville Area Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club meeting at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 8, at Creekside Place, 102 Maple St., Evansville.

To become a member of Rock Hour Community, sign up at rockhourcommunity.timebanks.org. Once an account is activated, more information is available using a username and password.

For more information on Rock Hour Community, call Gary Messinger, community outreach coordinator, at (608) 882-9032 or email silvercloud@live.com, or call training leader Becky Schenk-Gonzales at (608) 751-2116 or email redbekia@yahoo.com.

For general information on TimeBanks, visit timebanks.org.

Photo



Gary Messinger

EVANSVILLE — Jane volunteered two hours helping her neighbor with yard work.

Through a TimeBanks exchange, Jane received two hours of help on her taxes from Bob.

Bob then redeemed his two hours to take a local art class for free offered by Mary.

TimeBanks centers on the idea that everyone has something to offer.

Evansville leaders are bringing the concept to the area with the creation of Rock Hour Community. They hope it spreads through Rock County.

"A really important value is that everyone's time is looked at and valued equally," said Gary Messinger of Evansville. "So, no matter if you're creating a website, pulling weeds, scrubbing a bathroom floor or doing taxes, everybody's hour is an hour. That's what it's based on—the great equalizer."

TimeBanks is a community of members who trade time. Every hour that a member helps another member, the member earns an hour in his or her account.

Reciprocity levels the playing field, Messinger said.

Messinger works as the community outreach coordinator for the Dane County TimeBank, which has gained about 2,000 members and 140 organizations in its nearly seven years of existence. The Dane County organization is looked at as a leader in the movement and is one of the largest in the country, he said.

Messinger moved to Evansville three years ago and saw the area as ripe for something such as TimeBank. He connected with key leaders in town, and the idea grew. A steering committee planning Rock Hour Community is ready to sign members to begin exchanging their talents.

The TimeBanks concept has been around for years internationally—more than 30 countries have programs, said Messinger, who is volunteering as the community outreach coordinator for Rock Hour Community.

The thought was to start in the Evansville area and spread across Rock County as the organization strengthens and grows, he said. Volunteer coordinators in each community will provide assistance, he said.

People can register for membership online. Rock Hour organizers will have one-on-one training with members on how to use the system and how to make the most of the experience. Members then will post the services or talents they are offering or need.

Organizers will do basic background checks on potential members and try to balance creating a safe environment with including as many people as possible, Messinger said. People considering accepting help from fellow TimeBanks members should use common sense and consider asking for references.

"The nature of the system attracts a certain spirit of person," he said. "It recognizes that everyone has something to contribute—we're all equal."

TimeBanks are a great tool for nonprofit organizations with limited budgets and staff because the program provides access to an "incredible wealth of resources and volunteers," Messinger said. Organizations usually spend more hours than they bank, but they can provide hours by offering space for meetings, for example.

TimeBanks isn't an accounting firm—it's not about tracking how many hours someone has volunteered or spent, Messinger said. The expectation is when someone "spends" hours on a project, he or she will turn around and help someone else.

"It's about building community," he said.

Messinger said the concept can be a game changer for people with disabilities. He works with Dane County residents with disabilities to get them involved at Dane County TimeBank.

Last year, 75 people in Dane County's developmental disability program volunteered about 855 hours and used about 1,045 hours, he said.

"I think that's pretty powerful," he said.

His face lit up when he talked about the connections he's witnessed through Dane County TimeBank.

A lot of people need some kind of help, but it's hard for them to ask for it, he said. This tool makes it easier to ask because they're not seeking a handout.

"You know by coming in, you're helping me for a couple hours, but there's a full expectation on me that I'm going to turn around and help somebody else, too," he said.

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